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AUTHOR Brogan, Bernard R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how teacher portfolios could be used to provide teachers with the opportunity to grow professionally in concert with other teachers and in ways that promote school, district, and professional student performance standards. An opening section discusses the lack of progress in developing effective teacher evaluation and improvement procedures in recent years. A discussion of portfolio use argues that it can encourage collegiality and collaboration; experimentation; incorporation of available knowledge bases; involvement in goal setting, implementation, evaluation, and decision-making; time to work on staff development and assimilate new learning; leadership and sustained administrative support; incentives and rewards; designs built on principles of adult learning; and integration of individual goals with school and district goals. A list of what to include in a portfolio suggests statement of goals and philosophy of teaching; summary of professional responsibilities and involvements; criteria for assessing teaching performance; and criteria for assessing service to school and the profession. It is concluded that portfolios allow for teachers to be in the middle of current efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the schools. Contains 32 references. (JB)

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The Case for Teacher Portfolios[1]

Bernard R. Brogan, Ph.D.
Widener University

ED 381 516

Opening Statement

The more I study about educational reform the more I agree with the well-worn axiom,"education begins when the classroom door closes." Despite all we know about the importance of active learning, effective schools, curriculum alignment, strategic planning, national standards, tracking, site-based management, and the myriad of other equally important issues that impact student learning, in truth the greatest influence on student learning was always and remains the classroom teacher. It is therefore reasonable to assert that any real improvement in the quality of teaching and learning will depend in large measure on the following three conditions: (1) the commitment of classroom teachers to continually assess and improve upon their own teaching as measured by student performance, (2) the willingness of teachers to collaborate with their colleagues to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the school level and (3) the recognition that teachers must have a central role in shaping and developing their profession. If one agrees with this premise, the need to better understand what teachers do after they close their classroom door becomes as apparent as the need to encourage teachers to open themselves to the opportunity to learn more about their own teaching and the teaching of others in their school and in their profession.

How best to foster teacher commitment to continual improvement and collaboration with other teachers within their schools and their profession raises certain important questions:

How are we currently judging the quality of teaching in the classroom?

How are teachers currently assessing their own strengths and weaknesses?

In what ways are teachers rewarded for learning about and utilizing the latest available content and teaching knowledge?

How are teachers encouraged to establishing goals and learner outcomes that are consistent with the goals and learner outcomes of their school and their profession?

In what ways are teachers encouraged to integrate what they learn in professional development activities into their classroom practice?

How are teachers currently encouraged to collaborate with other teachers?

Although one could respond at length to each of these questions detailing how *some teachers*, *certain schools* and *various programs* are encouraging reflection, collaboration, and coordination, most of us know the more honest answer is simply that, by and large, very little is being done in these areas. Yet, I submit, much of what we hope to accomplish in our efforts to improve student learning is hinged on the willingness and ability of

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teachers - both individually and collectively - to readily respond to these questions in a manner that satisfies the above three conditions.

I argue in this paper that the current system of teacher evaluation is inadequate because it fails to promote or reward the level of teacher development and professional involvement required to achieve high performance standards in ourselves and in our students. I propose that teachers, instead, consider assessing their own growth and performance with a portfolio approach similar to that used by other professionals and consistent with the movement toward authentic performance assessment used in a growing number of classrooms.

The Current Condition of Teacher Evaluation

When I was teaching high school the official basis for my annual review was two visits from the assistant principal, a likeable administrator who always seemed busy troubleshooting and disciplining students. He'd usually let me know when he was coming and arrived pretty much on time. He'd stay for fifteen minutes and later that day I would receive in my mail a summary of his evaluation. In addition to a score of "satisfactory" (the other choice being "below satisfactory") on various items on the evaluation form,"Well organized," attractive bulletin board," and "good idea putting daily objectives on the blackboard," were typical remarks made in the "addition comments section." At the time I had no problem with the way I was evaluated. It was a non-threatening, harmless event. I went on teaching and he went on observing the next of many teachers he was assigned to evaluate. To see whether or not things have changed since my teaching days a decade ago, I did a "quick and dirty" survey of current teacher performance assessment by asking practicing teachers (currently enrolled in graduate educations courses) to describe in twenty five words or less how their teaching performance is assessed each year. The following typify their responses:

> *"Principal observation - 2 x each year with post conference conference."*
> (Elementary Teacher)
>
> *"End of the year overall evaluation formed filled out by principal."*
> (Elementary Teacher)
>
> *"Through the observation process which occurs for tenured teachers once a year."*
> (Elementary)
>
> *"Tenured teachers are evaluated two times a year using a standardized evaluation instrument with room for personal input."* (Elementary)
>
> *"My performance is evaluated by the principal and department supervisor. I am observed once per year and receive (1) one final evaluation by June 1. This evaluation is a combination of instruments, classroom management and other related behaviors concerning human relations skills."* (Middle School).
>
> *"Presently my principal or vice-principal comes into my class 2 x a year. The state also has a form that we are evaluated on - satisfactory, unsatisfactory, We sign this each year."* (High School)

It is not the purpose here to provide a balanced or comprehensive picture of the teacher evaluation process. Indeed, if that was the task much might be written about the success of this or that program in certain school districts around the country. If, however, the above responses are representation of the typical evaluation process, as I believe they are, there is clearly a major gap between where we are and where we want to be in terms of assessing self-growth and collaborative endeavors. Part of the problem with current evaluation practices may lie in the competing purposes of these evaluations. In his text, An Administrator's Guide for Evaluating Programs and Personnel, Edward F. DeRoche speaks to this point.

> "It seems apparent that there are two purposes for evaluating teachers: the first is to improve teacher performance, the second to provide a measure of accountability. That's it. Everything else is a variation on the theme" (1987, p. 97.)

Establishing the purposes of teacher evaluation as improving teacher performance and measuring accountability - although true to the case - creates an environment which discourages teachers from being risk-takers. Teachers, for example, are not likely to try new teaching strategies such as cooperative learning if they are held accountable to measures that represent outdated notions of the learning process. This point is illustrated by an incident that happens all too often. A teacher in one of my graduate courses recently told me that her principal came to do his semi-annual classroom observation on a day when her class was engaged in a cooperative learning activity. Excited because the lesson was going so well, she expressed how frustrating it was to have the principal leave a few minutes later with a whisper, "I'll come back again when *you* are doing something." Unless we define what we mean by "improving teaching performance" and "measures of accountability" we are left with a shroud of ambiguity that discourages the type of innovative practices that engage teachers in the process of self-renewal and collaboration.

Under the current system, teacher evaluation is typically done by an administrator (vice-principal) or quasi-administrator (head of the department) with little if any involvement of other faculty. This, I believe, creates a unauthentic context for professional growth and collaboration, often wrought with compromise or, in some cases, confrontation. As a result, administrators carry out their duties in a manner similar to my experience and to that described by our sample teachers above. Consider the advice offered by Popham in his text for aspiring administrators.

> Because of the nature of a typical instructional event in which a teacher is involved, we are obliged to consider the individual teacher as an instructional *treatment*. Of course, a classroom teacher relies on textbooks, as well as a variety of other instructional support devices, to teach the pupils. But inasmuch as it is the teacher who orchestrates the medley of instructional inputs the pupils receive, it is possible to consider each teacher as constituting a unique instructional treatment, and therefore to evaluate that instructional treatment as such" (1988, p. 273).

Twenty years ago Gage and Winne questioned this calculated approach to teacher evaluation arguing that performance should not be based solely on objective data but rather require that the teacher "search for meaning in experience" (1972, p. 152). This search for meaning and authentic experience, I submit, is too often missing in the daily practice of our teachers. Most schools, despite what they strive to provide for their students, do not serve well as learning communities for teachers. Classroom teachers go about doing what they see to be their job - teaching the curriculum, maintaining an orderly classroom, building

self-esteem, and so on. - in isolation with little *genuine engagement* with other teachers (beyond the perfunctory grade-level, team or department meetings). As Roland Barth asserts:

> "Those who value public education, those who hope to improve our schools, should be worried about the stunted growth of teachers. Teacher growth is closely related to pupil growth. Probably nothing within a school has more impact on students in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. The crux of teachers professional growth, I feel, is the development of a capacity to observe and analyze the consequences for students of different teaching behaviors and materials . .. [and] teachers need to be able to relate their classroom behaviors to what other teachers are doing in their classrooms. Teachers think they are doing that. Many do, but many do not do it very systematically or regularly" (p. 49).

Providing teachers the opportunity to grow professional in concert with other teachers and in ways that promote school, district, and professional student performance standards should be the single most important criterion for judging the quality of professional development programs and the teacher evaluation process. The next section of this paper provides suggestions on how portfolios might be used to achieve these purposes.

Portfolios: Promoting and Demonstrating Professional Growth

Portfolios have been defined in many ways depending on their purpose. Frequently, we use the examples of artists, architects, and photographers to explain what portfolios mean to other professions. McTighe (1994) described portfolios in a meaningful way for teachers: portfolios are lasting repositories of materials which preserve and attest to the growth, achievement and increased maturity throughout [a teacher's career]" (p. 2). For the past several years, the use of "portfolios" as a means of engaging students in their own learning experience has received positive endorsement from educational theorists and practitioners (Reichel, 1994; Frazier and Paulson, 1992; Hiebert and Calfee, 1989; Shepard, 1989; Wolf, 1989).

Portfolio-type assessment has also been recognized for its potential in improving teacher education programs (Diez, 1993; Hinkel, 1993; Viechnicki et al., 1993) As educators continue to recognize the need to bridge the gap between teacher training and classroom practice (Report on the Commission on the Education of Teachers, 1991; Valli, 1992; Rikard and Beacham, 1992), teacher training programs are gradually focusing their attention on performance - what beginning teachers need to know and be able to do. Portfolios are seen here as an attractive device for establishing performance criteria, for assessing individual and program strengths, and for collecting the various demonstrations of excellence. It should be noted that the author here makes a subtle but important distinction between the use of portfolio assessment for prospective teachers and practicing teachers. Whereas portfolios are used to document a teacher candidate's capability, teacher portfolios document the tendencies of teachers to act in capable ways.

Teacher portfolios have also been advanced as a means to improve college teaching (Seldin, 1991; Seldin and Annis, 1990) Seldin explains the interest in teaching portfolios in higher education: "Today, the nation's colleges and universities are attempting to

respond to new understandings about what elements define effective teaching. And at the same time, they are beset by public pressures to improve their systems of teaching accountability. . . .Both [of these] challenges can be met, at least in part, through the use of the teaching portfolio" (p.1).

Most relevant to the professional development of in-service teachers, portfolios are being used as an essential component of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification process (NBPTS, 1991; Baratz-Snowden, 1990). In January, 1995 eighty one teachers were board certified by NBPTS, a movement that is receiving broad support among educators, business leaders, governors and the presidents of the nation's two largest teacher unions, according to the New York Times (January 6, 1995). Noting that there are currently few ways of rewarding and encouraging excellent teaching, Albert Shanker stated that "Board certification can provide an incentive for these teachers to stay in the classroom where they can go on giving kids the benefit of their knowledge and skill - and where they can help other teachers improve the way they teach" (Shanker, 1995, p. 34).

Using portfolios as the criteria for board certification is commendable and demonstrates how portfolios can be used to measure excellence in teaching. But can we afford to limit ourselves to *a few good teachers*? Perhaps it is time to consider using portfolios as a standard for promoting and demonstrating the professional growth of all teachers. The following examples are provided as illustrations of the possible advantages of using portfolios:.

Portfolios encourage teachers to "begin with the end in mind" (Covey, 1989, p. 95), and establish their mission, goals and learner outcomes consistent with their own philosophy and the goals of their school community.

Portfolios are best prepared in consultation with others, and therefore provide a naturally setting for collegial interaction.

Portfolios provide clear evidence of what is important to the teacher and serve as a way for teachers to align what's important to them with what's important to their school district and their profession.

Portfolios motivate teachers to be selective, identifying what is really important to them as teachers and members of the school and professional communities.

Portfolios allow there to be certain required items important to the goals of the district as well as elective items which are of special interest to the individual teacher.

Portfolios enable teachers to display their accomplishments for examination by others. And, in the process, they contribute both to [professionally] sound personnel decisions and to the professional development of individual faculty members (Seldin, 1991).

Portfolios can serve as the basis of criteria for how well a teacher is doing according to established criteria and as a catalyst for discussion on ways for continuous improvement thereby promoting teachers to continually renew their teaching skills and knowledge-base.

As noted earlier, the great challenge to our current process of evaluating teachers lies in the competing and sometimes contradictory aim of nurturing professional growth while measuring accountability. This is no less a challenge to portfolio assessment. Clearly, the fundamental question on the minds of those involved in the development and evaluation of teacher portfolios must be: Who judges the quality of the portfolios and by what standards? Some insight into the answer to this important question can be found in the research of Loucks-Horsley (1987) who identified what are considered the ten most important characteristics of successful teacher development. Their findings provide a framework for arguing the case for teacher portfolios and a basis for developing an effective teacher portfolio assessment program.

1. Collegiality and Collaboration

Hilliard (1991) emphasized the importance of collaboration when he insisted that "Teachers need their own intellectual and emotional hunger to be fed. They need to experience the joy of collaborative discussion, dialogue, critique, and research" (p. 36). This need for collaboration is considered by some as the critical factor in the success of any change or reform process (Fullam, 1991; Raywid, 1993). As earlier noted, collaboration in the development, implementation, and assessment of teacher portfolios is at the heart of the process. A "portfolio development team" consisting of "portfolio consultants," colleagues, and "instructional leaders" (e.g. assistant principal, department chair, team leader) should assist the teacher in the beginning and throughout the process. Any portfolio that does not incorporate exchange of ideas and partnerships with other professionals would likely be inconsistent with thoughtful school and district goals.

2. Experimentation and Risk Taking

Roland Barth argued persuasively that . . . "if we want students to be less docile and more inventive and adventuresome in their thinking, then adults must model risk taking as well as learning. If we want to improve schools, we must risk doing things differently next September than we did them last September" (1991, p. 164). Under the current system of teacher evaluation there is little incentive for teachers to be risk takers yet we know that continuous improvement requires that we take a chance on new ideas and strategies. Portfolios can not only encourage innovation, they can provide the license to take risks.

3. Incorporation of Available Knowledge Bases

A well constructed teacher portfolio will encourage teachers to learn in three important areas: (1) the content of what they are teaching (2) strategies in how best to teach and (3) applying the content and strategies into their everyday practice. Schools and portfolio assessment teams that emphasize the incorporation of available knowledge bases as a critical component of a teacher portfolio recognize the important (and often missing) link between professional development activities (e.g. workshops, in-service programs, graduate education) and classroom teaching.

4. Appropriate Participant Involvement in Goal Setting, Implementation, Evaluation, and Decision Making

Portfolios are ideally suited to accomplish this important element of successful professional develop. Teachers are not only involved throughout the process, they are at

the center of the process. Given the opportunity to reflect on what constitutes a fair representation of quality teaching, there can be little doubt that most thoughtful teachers will consider their work in light of the overall mission of the school and district. In so doing, these teacher portfolios become the collective blueprint for school improvement.

5. Time to Work on Staff Development and Assimilate New Learnings

Most notably documented by Lortie (1975) and address in numerous reports (for example, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1987) it has been acknowledged that teachers work in isolation with little time for collaboration. This condition has prompted an escalating recognition that teachers need time to collaborate with each other. The absence of this opportunity is an obstacle to most school improvement initiatives, and would certainly diminish the potential value of teacher portfolios. A key element of any school's portfolio assessment program must be the articulation between and amongst teachers on educational goals, learner outcomes, and so forth. Naturally, time to work on the development of the portfolio is essential. As high school teacher Bill Chaffin opined, "If we were true professionals, we would be given the time to engage in some reflective practices at school that would make it much easier for people to go through the change process"(Teacher Magazine, Nov. 1993, p. 38).

6. Leadership and Sustained Administrative Support

Anyone who takes a serious look at past attempts at promoting change at the school level recognizes the important role that administrators play in the success or failure of that innovation. Seldin (1991) argued that one thing we have learned about using portfolios for teacher development is that "Top-level administrators must give their active support to the teaching portfolio concept. That means they must be publicly committed and must provide the necessary resources to the project" (p. 28). Beyond this administrative endorsement, the success of portfolio assessment will unquestionably depend on the genuine support of teachers and their professional associations.

7. Appropriate Incentives and Rewards

Most management and personnel textbooks include a chapter on how best to motivate employees through rewards and incentives. Rebore (1987), for example, advises that "Not all individuals value the same type of rewards. Consequently, a rewards program must be flexible enough to meet the expectations of [the] individual. . . [and] structured in such a way that a person will realize he is acting in his own best interest when he is acting in in the interest of the school district" (pp. 237-238). The bottom line in all that is written on the topic of what motivates individuals to perform "above and beyond the call of duty" may be bluntly summed up by the following question, What's in it for me?" Many teachers find the answer to that question in the satisfaction of knowing that they make a difference in the lives of their students. Portfolios are well suited to promote an intrinsic reward system by increasing teachers' participation in the decision-making process, providing opportunities for personal growth, and diversity of challenging activities (Rebore, 1987). Professional recognition, merit pay, grants for classroom projects, promotion to Master Teacher status, and paid mentoring responsibilities are a few of many possible extrinsic rewards that could motivate teachers - under the right circumstances. Unfortunately, the current structure of evaluating and rewarding teacher performance does not encourage teachers, either intrinsically or extrinsically, to stretch them to reach high performance

standards. Like other professional development endeavors, how high the stakes are in terms of incentive will likely play an important role in the success of teacher portfolios. .

8. Designs Built on Principles of Adult Learning and the Change Process

Lewis (1988) cautions that with faculty development it is important that no one is identified as a "poor" teacher. "The assumption is that all of us have things about our teaching that could be improve" (p.104). Emphasizing this point throughout the portfolio development and assessment process acknowledges what we know about adult learning. The emerging literature on how adults learn suggests why past innovations may have failed and provides insight into how best to engage teachers in the process. Lawler (1991), for example, offers six keys to facilitating adult learning: (1) understand and reduce anxiety, (2) elicit and incorporate expectations, (3) acknowledge and utilize experience, (4) provide and encourage active participation, (5) identify and incorporate relevant content, and (6) facilitate change and growth. Facilitating change is perhaps the greatest challenge facing educational leaders in this era of reform (Fullam, 1991; Morgolis, 1991), and understanding the nature of the change process as it applies to the introduction of teacher portfolios is important indeed.

9. Integration of Individual Goals with School and District Goals

The importance of aligning teacher goals with district goals is illustrated in the outcome-based education (OBE) movement; a reform initiative which emphasizes the need for establishing meaningful learner outcomes and high stakes performance standards (Spady, 1988; Nyland, 1991; Wiggins, 1989; Wolf, 1989; Shepard, 1989).The lesson learned from the OBE movement is that the challenging task of building community consensus on what students should know and be able to do pales in comparison to making that happen in the classroom. Teacher portfolios have the potential to enable a school district to achieve its goals if the portfolio is assessed, in part, on how well individual teachers strive to promote district goals. In so doing, the integration of individual goals with school and district goals is achieved.

10. Formal Placement of the Program within the Philosophy and Organizational Structure of the School and District

The degree to which teacher portfolios will improve teaching and learning will be directly linked to the status that are afforded in the overall mission and function of the school and school district. If portfolios are used merely to check off how teachers are doing - in a manner similar to the current evaluation practices - their value will be limited. If, however, teacher portfolios are considered the showcase for individuals to demonstrate their growth and accomplishments in the classroom, the school, and their profession, the potential of portfolio assessment will be without bounds. For this to happen, portfolios must have a formal place within the philosophy and organization of the school and district.

Based on the above characteristics of successful professional development, I believe the case for teacher portfolios is compelling. If introduced in a thoughtful manner, and developed according to the above principles, teacher portfolios can be an important part of a comprehensive program to improve teacher performance and student learning.

The Portfolio Framework

It is not possible in this assignment to address all of the issues that surround the introduction, implementation, and evaluation of the teacher portfolio assessment process. Before beginning the process, teachers and administrators need to consider a number of questions including but not limited to (1) who will serve as portfolio consultants,? (2) what school and district goals should be represented in the portfolios,? (3) who will evaluate the portfolios (portfolio assessment teams),? and (4) what rewards and incentives (or perhaps sanctions) will be attached to the portfolios? This paper has thus far attempted to provide the parameters for discussion, but each school and school district will need to answer these and the other important questions that arise in a manner which is responsive to their own school community.

The question of what should be included in the portfolio must also be considered in light of what is important to each teacher, school, and district. Portfolios that represent the unique qualities of teachers and school communities will, in my opinion, be the most powerful. The following list of what might be included in a portfolio, based on the principles of teaching, professional growth, and service, is offered as a framework for building teacher portfolios.

1. Statement of Goals and Philosophy of Teaching

The work of teachers is very much influenced by the philosophy they carry regarding teaching, learning, and knowledge. For example, many thoughtful writers have argued that a liberal studies curriculum founded on the principles of the Western canon should be the basis for education while others have persuasively argued for an emphasis on the learning process. Portfolios provide teachers the opportunity to contemplate their goals and philosophy of teaching in a way that considers the goals of their school and their profession. In a sense, this becomes their credo and serves as the preamble to their portfolio.

2. Summary of Professional Responsibilities and Involvements

Each portfolio should include a statement describing teaching responsibilities along with other assigned duties, voluntary involvements, and professional development activities. This section might include information on classes taught, student load, activities sponsored, involvement in curriculum development projects, mentoring responsibilities, graduate course work, conferences attended, etc. Essentially, this section of the portfolio serves as both a resume of the professional activities of the teacher (both in and outside the classroom) and a description of the circumstances in which the responsibilities and involvements were carried out. It would be important for a high school teacher to note, for example, that she was asked to teach two new and different courses in a given year or that an elementary school teacher had twenty-nine students, four of whom were identified with attention deficit disorder.

3. Criteria for Assessing Teaching Performance.

This section details the steps teachers have taken to evaluate and improve their teaching. Seldin (1991) suggests that this section include changes resulting from self-evaluation, time spent reading journals on improving teaching, participation in seminars,

workshops and professional meetings on improving teaching. The following list suggests other items that might be included in this section:

examples of new thematic units developed

learner outcomes achieved by students that are consistent with department or grade level outcomes and school and district learner outcomes

student evaluations

statements from colleagues who have observed teaching

reports on student academic progress

samples of student work (e.g. student portfolios)

use of creative approaches to teaching (e.g. cooperative learning)

statements from administrators who have evaluated teaching performance

pictures or descriptions of how the teacher has created an engaging learning environment

documented use of instructional technology

use of authentic, rich means for authentically assessing student performance

model lesson and unit plans

communicating with parents about student progress

honors or other recognitions of outstanding teaching

video of sample lesson

4. Criteria for Assessing Service to School and Profession

This paper opened with the argument that three conditions must persist if we hope to achieve any real improvement in the quality of teaching and learning: (1) the commitment of classroom teachers to continually assess and improve upon their own teaching as measured by student performance, (2) the willingness of teachers to collaborate with their colleagues to improve the quality of teaching at the school level and (3) the recognition that teachers must have a central role in shaping and developing their profession. In the last section, teachers demonstrate how they worked toward meeting the first condition. In this section, teachers demonstrate how they strive to meet the challenges of the second and third condition. Contributions that might be featured in this section include:

sponsoring clubs

coaching

participation in local, state, regional, or national activities related to teaching and the teaching profession

leadership involvements

sharing lesson plans

organizing workshops

serving as a cooperating teacher to a student teacher providing evidence of the steps taken to provide a successful experience for the student teacher and the students

serve as a mentor to a beginning teacher providing evidence of the steps taken to provide a successful experience for the student teacher and the students

contributions to education journals

serving on a leadership task force

serving on a portfolio assessment team

advising students

tutoring

serving on curriculum development committee

serving as a portfolio adviser

Closing Argument

In closing the case for teacher portfolios, I want to reiterate the basic tenet of this paper: teachers must be front and center in our effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning in our schools. I believe this to be the most salient point in the whole discussion on teacher portfolios. Trying to impose school reforms, known by some teachers as "the flavor of the month," has for the most part failed. Likewise, if portfolios are prescribed by those "on the top" for "those at the bottom" they will also fail to achieve their broader purposes as defined in this paper. If, however, teachers and administrators are willing to engage in honest dialogue about the potential as well as limitations of the portfolio concept, there is good reason to believe that portfolios may emerge as the catalyst for promoting professional growth and for recognizing teachers for their contributions. More schools and more classrooms will become places where teachers welcome the opportunity to learn more about their own teaching and the teaching of others in their school and in their profession.

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